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ABSTRACT

This paper demonstrates with specific examples from various students' journals how subtly and, at the same time, pervasively ethnocentricity expresses itself, and offers suggestions on how to assess and combat ethnocentric beliefs through writing assignments and classroom exercises in an international business law course at Indiana University. The use of student writings as a valuable measuring tool for this type of evaluation is discussed, as well as the methods employed in handling collection, grading, evaluation, and encouraging student use of the journals. The paper also discusses the experiences of students and faculty in the use of the journals in the international business law course and how the journals provided the avenue to address issues that otherwise would have remained obscured. It is noted that the ethnocentric attitudes which were discovered in the students' journals hinged on a feeling not only of cultural and national superiority, but also on a perception of economic superiority. (GLR)

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Revealing, Addressing and Redressing Ethnocentricity: Teaching International Business Law with Process Response Journals

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When one considers the various attributes essential in today's increasingly global business environment, several qualities immediately come to mind: communication skills, interpersonal skills, and the ability to adjust to different cultural settings. Perhaps the best time for developing these valuable skills is during students' formative undergraduate years as they may be difficult to learn at a later point in their career. Especially in regard to cultural and ethnic tolerance it may be vital that students be educated no later than their undergraduate years. While many schools have international business programs, this fact alone is no guarantee that their students are made aware of, much less educated in, all of the cultural intricacies that so thoroughly shape international

The lack of international awareness business graduates often bring to their first job may, in many instances, be perpetuated throughout their professional careers. The outward manifestations of this cultural insensitivity may range from the awkward and embarrassing to the economically devastating. Thus, it is important that our international business classes instill a better understanding not only of the mechanics of business operations; but, as importantly, they must prepare students for the cultural diversity that shapes the global business environment.

Accordingly, the Indiana University School of Business has added an international business law course to its offerings. The senior level course is designed to familiarize students with the unique legal problems faced by multinational corporations. Students are introduced to the predominant national and supranational legal institutions and expected to understand the nature and significance of their impact on global business decisions. An underlying assumption of this course is that laws and legal institutions are reflections of past, present, and future values seeking expression through society's political and economic institutions. By understanding the fabric of various societies, business persons can better comprehend, anticipate, and formulate the legal environments in which they operate. Thus, a key goal of the class is to expose students to the political, economic, and cultural forces that shape the international legal environment and, ultimately, determine the nature and form of

international business transactions.

This course is taught by a business law faculty member and a writing consultant who assists in planning, designing, and evaluating written assignments. Although several varying written projects were designed into the material, the cornerstone of the course was to be a daily process journal. This daily journal had the purpose of exposing the students to the importance and value of feeling and experiencing rather than merely listening and reciting. Moreover, the journals provided the instructors with valuable insight into the students' learning processes, their comprehension of the readings and discussions, and their personal perspectives vis-a-vis the material.

Perhaps the most revealing insight provided by the journals was the glaring ethnocentricity many students displayed. Although most of the students had taken or were concurrently enrolled in courses with international components, their perspective of the world was surprisingly narrow and ethnically prejudiced. The journals exposed this phenomenon and permitted the instructors to respond to it in a prompt and personal manner. First, through the exchange of comments in the journals, students themselves became aware of some of their tendencies and actively attempted to broaden their horizons. Second, the most glaring manifestations of these characteristics provided the basis for class discussions of national and cultural differences and their impact on legal systems, institutions, and rules. These journal entries provided an impetus for collaborative exercises and projects designed to

permit students to better internalize the cultural differences that greatly influence global business transactions.

A fundamental assumption of this paper is that in order for international business education to fulfill its primary objectives, it is imperative that ethnocentricity be addressed in all courses pertaining to global affairs. However, before educators can effectively address and redress this phenomenon, they must first become aware of how such attitudes are manifest in each individual student. Because process response journals encourage students to discuss their personal views openly and frankly, they make it relatively easy for faculty to detect, address, and redress some of the implications of overly narrow cultural perspectives. This paper will demonstrate with specific examples from various students' journals how subtly and, at the same time, pervasively ethnocentricity expresses itself. Simultaneously, it will offer suggestions on how to assess and combat ethnocentric beliefs through writing assignments and classroom exercises.

The Response Journals

Current composition teaching and research have shown that expressive writing is a useful tool for improved learning not only in English classes, but across the curriculum. Informal writing assignments and response journals which allow students to respond to the issues raised in class and connect them to related

material outside of any particular classroom make inroads even into technical and professional disciplines. Such connections can be critical in not only learning but understanding and internalizing the material the students are presented with. Based on the theory that writing is a way of knowing, composition researchers and proponents of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) contend that informal writing is not just an alternative to rote learning, it should completely replace rote memorization in all disciplines and classrooms.

The use of response journals, dialectic journals, or dialogue journals can, according to Ann Berthoff, be a way of "keeping track of the development of ideas, as well as of their inception and origin, of monitoring a work in progress" (1987, 11). Berthoff, who is among the most fervent supporters of journal pedagogy, points out that journals allow students to insert themselves actively into the learning process and the procedures of critical inquiry in all disciplines, and thus to insert themselves into the world of knowledge. For many journal supporters, the informal dialectic notebook is one of the most important tools in teaching critical thinking. Journals allow students, and all writers for that matter, to, what Paolo Freire calls, "problematize the existential situation." Berthoff explains: ". . . they are all naming the world, bringing ideas to bear on what they are naming and imagining and hypothesizing and transforming" (17). At the same time journals allow writers to return to earlier statements and assumptions and to re-assess

them. The circular operation involved in this return also brings the process of making meaning and knowledge to the consciousness of the students/writers. This can be a critical part of active learning because "*knowing how* to make meaning in one instance is facilitated by *knowing that* we have done so in other circumstances." (Berthoff 1987, 12) Moreover, the willingness to return to earlier positions shows that the students/writers are learning "the habit of questioning" which is at the heart of critical thinking and inquiry in all disciplines.

However, in order to be able to adopt the habit of questioning, students need to be able to experience both privacy and safety in journal writing. For teachers using journals this means abandoning the more traditional advice they give to students about audience awareness, organization, tone and style, etc. In his book Writing With Power, Peter Elbow argues that although "writing is usually communication with others. . . the essential transaction seems to be with oneself, a speaking to one's best self" (1981, 179). Although Elbow remains committed to the idea that writers should consider the needs of their audiences, he is quick to point out that it is "often difficult to work out new meaning while worrying about audience" (1987, 24). The result is clenched, defensive, and sometimes tangled writing and thinking.

Response journals allow students to either ignore audiences altogether or to imagine friendly audiences for themselves, audiences who foster a feeling of safety and privacy as well as

"mutual responsiveness". However, this means that teachers have to rethink traditional modes of responding to student writing. First and foremost, teachers who use journals in their classes need to forswear the notion that journal writing is only a writing assignment. Rather, journals are a means of active student-teacher communication; therefore, teachers have to become readers rather than evaluators. Journals often are the only place where students have access to the teacher's mind, and to an interactive, personalized response.

On the other hand, in order for their journals to be successful, students need to become knowers rather than merely consumers of knowledge. For many students learning consists mainly of reading not of writing. Writing, in turn, is seen as nothing more than a way to record the learned material (in its original form) without changing its shape. Because students are often insecure about their own beliefs and assumptions, they deny their existence and thus give knowledge a stability it does not have. Response journals, dialectic notebooks, or dialogue journals help students to see writing as an important tool for making meaning, not just for broadcasting meaning someone else has already provided them with. In addition, journals allow students to reflect about the world and to position themselves more firmly in it.

The use of journals in Indiana University's international business law class is premised on the notion that real learning requires that students feel and experience rather than merely

listen and read. In short, students must actively invest themselves in their educations rather than passively recounting the rhetoric of lecturers and authors.

In the syllabus, students were advised that their journal would be a place in which they could respond to the readings and discussions, ask questions, and formulate new ideas. They were further instructed to bring the journals to each session since occasionally class time would be devoted to making entries. Finally, it was made clear that on eight unannounced occasions throughout the semester, their journals would be collected and read.

At the outset, journal writing seemed to offer excellent potential for valuable returns for both the students and the instructors. From the students' standpoint, the requirement of daily entries would translate into the course being given day-to-day consideration. It was envisioned that on the days that the class did not meet the students would use the journal to make connections with their other courses as well as the events taking place in their social lives. Their entries have clearly demonstrated that this has been the case. It is enjoyable to read along as the students themselves discover, often to their own amazement, that this phenomenon is indeed occurring. It was also hoped that the students would use the journals to reformulate the ideas and concepts raised in their textual readings and class discussions. And, once again, the returns have been extremely positive in this regard. While there are varying degrees of

effort and achievement clearly evidenced in their entries, all students across the board are demonstrating greater and greater insights and sophistication in their comments and questions regarding the material.

Regular collection and reading of the students' journals definitely keeps the instructor more closely attuned to the students' comprehension of the course material. This continual feedback also proves extremely useful in understanding which teaching methods are working and which are failing. Finally, the students' regular entries and the instructors' personal responses create a meaningful dialogue which far exceeds what one might achieve through office visits and class discussions.

Whether and how to grade journals was a source of some concern. It was decided that they would be graded out of a doubt that students could be properly motivated to make serious entries in the absence of some type of immediate reward or sanction. Of the 300 points possible in the class, up to 50 can be earned on the journals. Students may earn up to 10 points each time the journals are collected. (They are collected eight times.) When collecting journals the instructors generally request that the students turn in their entries for five specific and consecutive dates. They are invited to turn in entries for any other days also; although the unsolicited days' entries will be read and answered, they will not graded. (Many students choose to turn in the extra pages.) For the most part, students will receive the full 10 points if they have made entries on each of the five

designated days and if the entries evidence some course-related thought. Once students have earned the full 50 points they may continue to turn in their entries; although they will no longer earn any points.

To simplify handling of the journals and to encourage their active use, students receive pre-printed journal forms on which to make their entries. Every two weeks they receive a packet containing enough forms for the up-coming two-week period. Active and regular use of the journal is further reinforced through the use of extensive comments each time the journals are graded. These comments range from simple answers to their inquiries to penetrating questions about their thoughts or feelings. Overwhelmingly, the students have responded with surprise and gratification at the number and depth of the instructors' responses. On several occasions an instructor has personally identified a student and his or her journal insights in class (always in a flattering way) when they complement a particular issue being discussed.

Ethnocentricity in the International Law Course

The journals have proven particularly helpful in better understanding the needs of students in an international business course. From their very earliest entries, many of the students have revealed a glaring ethnocentricity in their views of the world. Their narrow perspective of the world is first and foremost emotionally grounded which is obvious from many of their

entries; however, that does not make the ethical implication of their perspective any less serious.

The ethnocentric attitudes which were discovered in the students' journals hinged on a feeling not only of cultural and national superiority, but also on a perception of economic superiority. It seemed that the students felt compelled, often against better judgement and evidence to the contrary, to hold on to long-standing beliefs that the U.S. was, is, and always will be superior in every aspect to the rest of the world. They felt justified to express their contempt for cultural traditions of other countries which they saw as politically and economically less sophisticated. Moreover, their ethnocentricism expressed itself in a way which indicated that they were almost completely unaware of the ethical implications of their position. They demonstrated an affinity for a cultural Manifest Destiny thinking which was both surprising and, at times, offensive.

Although the students perceived their earliest and greatest problem to be not understanding precisely what types of entries were appropriate, the instructors were more concerned that even their earliest entries showed that most students brought insufficient and inaccurate sociopolitical conceptions with them into the class. The first problem was more easily addressed than the latter. First, on the day that the journals initially were collected for grading, students received copies of several entries from one of the instructor's personal journal. It was hoped that this action would both demonstrate the instructors'

willingness to share their thoughts and illustrate the types of entries that seemed appropriate. Later comments in the students' journals testified to the effectiveness of this strategy on both counts.

Second, the instructors pointed out specific statements in the text book that seemed somehow controversial or contradictory. For example, in one segment of the introductory chapter a senior vice president for foreign operations of a major real estate corporation stated that: "When you're dealing with people who make their living selling to the public, cultural barriers almost don't exist." Later, in the same excerpt, it is stated that:

> adapting to Japanese real estate culture proved difficult. Selling property, for example, is still considered a disgrace among some Japanese families, who insist their brokers keep the transaction secret. . . . "Here we came along with flags and open houses and lawn signs and all sorts of new ways to embarrass them. . ."

And in discussing operations in France a U.S. broker observed that "the French overwhelmingly consider brokers unsavory and unnecessary middlemen . . ." The instructors pointed out that the latter two quotations seemed inconsistent with the introductory statement (with the first seeming to be insensitive to cultural differences around the world). It was suggested that an inconsistency or insensitivity would seem an appropriate topic to explore as an entry in the process journal.

Later in that same segment, the real estate manager noted that after early problems with its Japanese venture, "[s]lowly, our concepts are now being accepted." This provided an opportunity to touch on the ethical implications of trying to

transplant U.S. business culture in a foreign nation rather than adapting one's methods to local customs. As with most ethical discussions, there was neither enough time for all students to vocalize their thoughts nor for any student to fully express his or her views. Accordingly, students were advised to use their journals to analyze the ethical issues and to be on the look out for other instances of cultural insensitivity and its ethical implications. Although the students were able to recognize and comment on the ethnocentric attitudes in others, they were still not aware of their own narrow perceptions.

For example, early in the semester, students were given an in-class exercise (See addendum, A-3.) in which they examined a case involving the legal liability of Union Carbide for the industrial disaster that occurred at Bhopal, India. The ensuing discussion turned into a rousing debate over the ethical aspects of doing business through subsidiaries in less developed nations. One particular student, in his journal, ridiculed his classmates:

> I get to listen to the other students in my group say why this is what should be done and what shouldn't, but they had no frame of reference. . . . Class discussion today confirms my suspicions about the general awareness of students. . . . Thus far, common sense . . . seems to render the best conclusion and/or decision.

The instructor responded to this students observations in the following way. "Whose common sense do we use? Does common sense vary across cultures" Within cultures?"

In the following class period the discussion focused on how the class's earlier examination of the ethics of conducting hazardous operations in less developed nations revolved

completely around the U.S. point of view and, at times, seemed quite paternalistic. Nobody really considered what the people and governments of such nations themselves might prefer. Several days later, the following entry appeared in a student's journal:

> After discussing the Union Carbide case, I have taken a hard look at my own value structure. I never really looked at this case from the Indian government's point of view. It seems like India wanted this facility no matter what consequences it may suffer. They wanted no U.S. management training in the plant. I can understand the government wanting to fill the available jobs with Indian nationals in order to further benefit their economy . . .

Later in the course, students were introduced to the International Court of Justice (World Court), some of its procedural rules, and several of its decisions. Some time was spent in class examining how a nation could not be forced to appear before the tribunal in any dispute unless that country voluntarily accepted jurisdiction. They also examined the Nicaragua v. United States case where the United States refused to comply with the World Court's decision against it. It was noted how, since the court's decisions are to be enforced by the Security Council, a permanent member, like the U.S. might be able to veto any enforcement action.

Overwhelmingly, the students' in their journal entries were quite frustrated with the World Court, observing that since its jurisdiction was voluntary and it was unable to enforce its judgments against the world powers, it was a worthless institution. For instance, one student remarked: "It just seems to me that because of the mechanics of the World Court, at the way they stand today, it is not really even needed. Since it

can't enforce its judgments, why the hell is it even needed?" The following reply was entered in this and other students' journals. "What might be its benefit? What is the good of a psychiatrist if she can't make us get better? What's the good of a marriage counselor? He can't make people try to get along."

In the very next class, discussion then focused more sharply on the notions of national sovereignty and international law enforcement. Students were presented with an article examining the Nicaragua decision and its impact on world opinion concerning the United States, the World Court, and international law. Much attention was then given to the differences in perceptions of the utility of the World Court between the developed and the lesser developed nations of the world. The instructor tried to guide the students toward a revised view of the worth and usefulness of the World Court. In a later journal entry, after reading the instructor's reply, this same student wrote:

> I understand better what I was questioning . . . [earlier]. I was not even considering the sovereignty aspect of not enforcing the decisions of the World Court on to the parties in a dispute. I no longer agree that there should not be a World Court. . . . I was trying to compare the World Court [with] our Supreme Court and the two cannot really be into the same category.

Students also were frustrated with and perplexed by the judicial and political institutions of the European Community. Their journal entries indicated a certain consternation with the inability of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) to directly enforce its judgments against the member states. Further, they were troubled by the heavy reliance that the ECJ places on the

national courts in the enforcement of community law. Finally, they were perplexed and confused by the respective roles of the Parliament, the Council, and the Commission in the European legislative process. Overwhelmingly, they ridiculed the European Community for implementing such an unwieldy structure.

Class discussion was then directed to the similarities between the European political institutions and the checks and balances incorporated in the political processes of the United States. Further, students then examined the governmental structure of the U.S. and its balancing between the powers of the national government and the states. Finally, they discussed the early history of the United States' independence and the differences between the unsuccessful Articles of Confederation and the present constitutional form of government.

In studying the Single Europe concept, several cases were analyzed whereby various member states attempted to erect regulatory barriers against trade from other member states. In one particular decision, Germany prohibited the importation of beer that contained additives. Germany defended its action, in part, on the ground that consumers would be misled if such beverages were labeled as "Bier." In their journals, numerous students thought it to be ludicrous that Germany would really be concerned with what was called "Bier" and what wasn't. Their comments showed a total lack of appreciation for the role of "Bier" in German culture.

Initial class discussions focused on discovering similar

cultural identifications (champagne in France, bourbon in Kentucky). It then examined more deeply routed traditions in the United States, such as the automobile industry and the notion of family farms. The same students who had ridiculed German insistence on keeping its "bier" pure, were quite staunch in their positions toward American cultural traditions. For example, several students were particularly outraged that a Japanese group was trying to purchase the Seattle Mariners baseball team. Class time was spent addressing the rampant "Japan bashing" that was cropping up more and more frequently in the journals. The baseball issue permitted an examination of the role of baseball in the national heritage of the U.S. as well as the motivations (racial and economic) behind the current anti-Japanese sentiments.

A group exercise was developed in order to help students rethink their initial journal observations concerning the "bier" case. Students were broken into groups of four or five and instructed to discuss the following topic:

> Europe has committed itself to a Single Europe movement. Should harmonization proceed even at the expense of longstanding cultural identity? In our country and in others have we witnessed instances of disastrous results from such progress? What role should business play in this debate?

A spokesperson then represented each group in a class-wide examination of the topic. The class generally arrived at the conclusion that society needed both general harmony and distinct cultural identities. The students seemed to feel that business itself might be able to provide the needed cultural identity that

appears to be at risk through political harmonization. In fact, many students believed that providing such identity might be an extremely viable business strategy.

Afterwards, the following entry appeared in one student's journal:

> I thought that the beer case was really humorous and also kind of sad. I guess I see that in a sense the breakdown of economic barriers is going to wear away at the cultures of the individual nations involved. They will have to standardize so many things that some of the cultural charms are bound to be lost. I guess nothing comes for free! I am not sure that in the long run it will be worth the price.

This exercise and other like it, as well as the ongoing dialogue in the journals, allowed the students to cultivate a better sense of the "other;" other cultures, other beliefs, other political and economic structures. They also learned to appreciate the other in themselves. Further, they were encouraged to understand that even in their own country they were the "other" in many cases.

One student described the U.S. as a "spoiled child who chooses to do whatever it pleases and not face the consequences." She went on to lament: "I think I can begin to understand why some countries are anti-U.S. Yes, I believe the U.S. is the greatest nation in the world and I am proud to be an American citizen, but I think the U.S. needs to clean up its image soon or it will only deteriorate in the future." In response, the instructor wrote in this student's journal: "We are the U.S.! What can we do to clean up this image?"

The kind of double perspective the journals fostered in the

students, allowing them to consider issues both as insiders and as outsiders, is essential in developing critical thinking and ethical decision making skills. Once students learn to accept their otherness, they can take a step back and look more critically than before at the actions of their own ethnic group, culture, nation, etc. Although the students' journal entries have shown that this kind of questioning can throw some students into existential "Angst," they have also proven that students are not necessarily resistant to new perspectives. Many of them experienced the journal as a valuable chance to try on other views for size and as a liberating opportunity to shed worn-out beliefs. For instance, at the end of the semester one student observed:

> Nobody is without a bias. If you agree with a particular bias you obviously will not recognize your own bias. You will just label it "truth." I am learning the benefits of arguing the opposite point of view. It is sort of scary though, because sometimes you begin to believe what you have always argued against.

Conclusion

Over the course of the semester the journal assignment soon turned into a unique opportunity for both the instructors and the students alike to address issues which would otherwise have remained obscured. Students' ethnocentricity is sometimes subtle, and often pervasive, but never so deeply ingrained that it cannot be addressed and redressed. The journals pointed the way to better classroom instruction and new directions in approaching this issue.

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